

ANOMIE

Anarchy in the 21st Century

Issue 2 - Autumn 2020

Housing crisis and Homelessness



Letter from Anomie

When the first issue of Anomie zine launched last December, the preparation for the second one had already begun. Homelessness and Housing crisis was a no-brainer topic and it came as no surprise to us that the housing crisis was, behind the health system, the second most important issue for voters in the last General Elections. It was a surprise though that Sinn Féin topped the polls, while Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil paid the toll of their policies, so an easy conclusion drawn is that the people of the Republic of Ireland want someone else in government to get their two main issues sorted (or, at least improved).

The number of homeless people and families in Dublin was a constantly increasing figure, but we are not sure who could understand or, to re-phrase it and put in the right context, who really had the selfless desire to dig further and realise that people were evicted, not because they were doing something wrong, but because they decided to feed their families over paying the -ridiculously high- rent on time. You see, priorities. At least, for those living in Dublin City centre, that was something that could not be hidden. In 2018, three buildings were occupied in the city centre as a reaction of people to help others that were thrown out of their homes and to highlight the issue in an activist way. It didn't last long, but now nobody can pretend that doesn't know – and, that was a win.

Around March, the pandemic arrived in Ireland, the number of cases increased quickly, strict measures were taken, the people showed responsibility (despite what the government tried to communicate through their channels) and we noticed a couple of things; first, the second issue, originally planned to hit the shelves in late April, wasn't possible to launch, because the bookshops were closed and second, the number of homeless people started falling down – a miracle! Apparently, there is a solution for our society to find a place for everyone – we just need to try, right? And, why all those people couldn't find a shelter before coronavirus visited us? Well, you know, priorities – again! Because, our society has set as a priority to turn Dublin to a top tourist destination at any cost. Meaning that if some of us have to be sacrificed for our holy cow, also known as economy and cash flow, let it be. Meaning that whole neighborhoods can be gentrified, not by improving the residents' quality of life there, but by expelling them from their places, further away from the city centre, which in the interim is being turned to a huge hotel for tourists from all over the world and a recreation centre for IT multinational giants. However, the pandemic put some things straight: when the problem is not a working or it is a low-class issue, a solution will be found, the 'unseen' ones can be seen and finally, the politicians show their immorality by grabbing any opportunity for their advantage like, presenting themselves as saviors, even though they are the only responsible ones for the continuous dissolution of the HSE. O tempora o mores!

What will you read in Anomie Issue 2 then? Issues that homeless women face (the 'unseen' ones we mentioned previously), articles about homelessness in Ireland and the UK and also, voices from other countries that have been facing the crisis in a worse scenario than us at the moment and we try to take our lessons; we talk to comrades from Greece and Portugal who share their experience from their constant fights.

Don't forget to check our Anomie podcast on Spotify, Mixcloud, Anchor and many other platforms. We are now uploading episodes regularly, so feel free to share your thoughts and any topics that you would like us to pick and discuss from an anarchist perspective. Our website can keep you informed for anything new our team does, so subscribing to our newsletter would help. Last, but not least, we would like to thank all bookshops and collectives all over Europe that are helping us by listing Anomie in their titles. You can find the full list on our website (<https://bit.ly/37w14nv>). Please visit them and show them your support.

Enjoy Issue no.2. Stay safe, stay strong and organise. Solidarity!

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Designed by Zoran Zelenika.



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Website www.anomiezone.com
e-mail anarchistreadings@gmail.com
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By Danai Spyrou

Bleeding With Dignity

Women have been having their periods since time immemorial. Apart from its biological function, their menstrual cycle has been an interesting medical, psychological, and cultural case study with numerous parameters. Throughout the world, women have been dealing with it in various, and sometimes resourceful, ways: from ancient Greece, where ragged cloths were put between the legs (hence “on the rag”), the use of loincloths in Egypt, carried nosegays of sweet to cover the odour, home-made tampons -and who knows how many other DIY period tips have been left undocumented- periods felt like a real struggle.

Personally, I feel extremely lucky to be alive in an era where I have easy access to pads, tampons, pills, IUDs, period track apps, menstrual cups, gynaecologists (hail capitalism!) and that I feel I have the absolute liberty to whine about it with my male friends. Undoubtedly, it's a way more privileged time for women's periods. Or not?

What if I told you that for many women in 2020 their menstrual reality resembles that of ancient and medieval times? Homeless women, women living in direct provision and other women on low incomes face a harrowing reality: many of them have no access to toilets or private spaces. They are forced to resort to desperate solutions: newspapers, used clothing, socks, toilet paper, plastic bags or, many times, nothing at all. No access to painkillers for those with dysmenorrhea or painful cramps. Add to that the embarrassment and shame. Others wait for homeless outreach crews to come by with pads. Or they steal. Drastic times call for drastic measures.

“What would happen if, magically, men could menstruate and women could not? Menstruation would become enviable, worthy, masculine: men would brag about how long and how much. Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea to help stamp out monthly discomforts. Sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free”.

- Gloria Steinem, *If Men Could Menstruate: A Political Fantasy. Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*



It is estimated that in the USA, there are 50,000 women living on the streets nationwide, with limited access to pads and tampons. In Ireland, a 2019 survey by PLAN International showed that more than half of young girls, aged 12–19, struggle to afford sanitary products. And the issue is not restricted to school students.

Menstruation is a real financial drain: in the UK, it is estimated that the average woman spends over £3500 on sanitary products¹. In Ireland, tampons and sanitary towels are not subject to Value Added Tax (VAT), which has a zero rate treatment on women's sanitary products, but new period products that may better suit some women, girls and the environment are still taxed at the highest rate of tax at 23%².

And, of course, this lack of menstrual hygiene has its health toll. According to Rhode Island Medical Journal, the repetitive use of unclean materials leads to distressing medical consequences, such as reproductive tract infections, such as UTIs, yeast infections, and vulvar contact dermatitis, include not cleaning genitals daily, especially during menstruation³.

However, there are some encouraging steps towards menstrual equity. In an attempt to relieve menstrual distress, New York state scrapped the VAT on feminine hygiene products. On June 21, the city council voted unanimously to distribute free tampons and sanitary pads in the city's schools, shelters, and jails. In Scotland, as part of the Scottish government's pilot project to tackle "period poverty", women and girls from low income households in parts of Aberdeen are to be offered free sanitary products. In Ireland and the UK, many organizations strive to relieve women's predicament. The Homeless Period Ireland is a volunteer-run initiative that aims to support as many women and girls during their menstrual cycles. Many Students' Unions across the UK have committed to providing free sanitary products to students.

Considering all of the above, "that time of month" can be a really dismaying experience for many women. When we see a homeless woman, the first thing that comes to our mind is that they need food or money. But how many of us have seen the bleeding woman in her? Lack of access to sanitary products is a dismaying issue that, due to the stigma and the sense of shame that has been following women for centuries, has been criminally overlooked. It is time to confront the daunting challenge of homeless women to secure sanitary materials and acknowledge that period management is a right, not a privilege. We, as society, should finally realise that sanitary products are necessities and not taboos and treat them accordingly. We all need to understand the challenges and difficulties girls and women confront when it comes to their own biology. But, above all, we ask for dignified ways to deal with it.

¹ Jerome, S. S. (2016) International Menstrual Hygiene Day: Don't Tampon Our Spirits. Rife.
<https://bit.ly/3aZM6GT>

² <https://bit.ly/2U3Xqv6>

³ <https://bit.ly/2UaQdsW>

By O. P.

Whither Irish Politics?

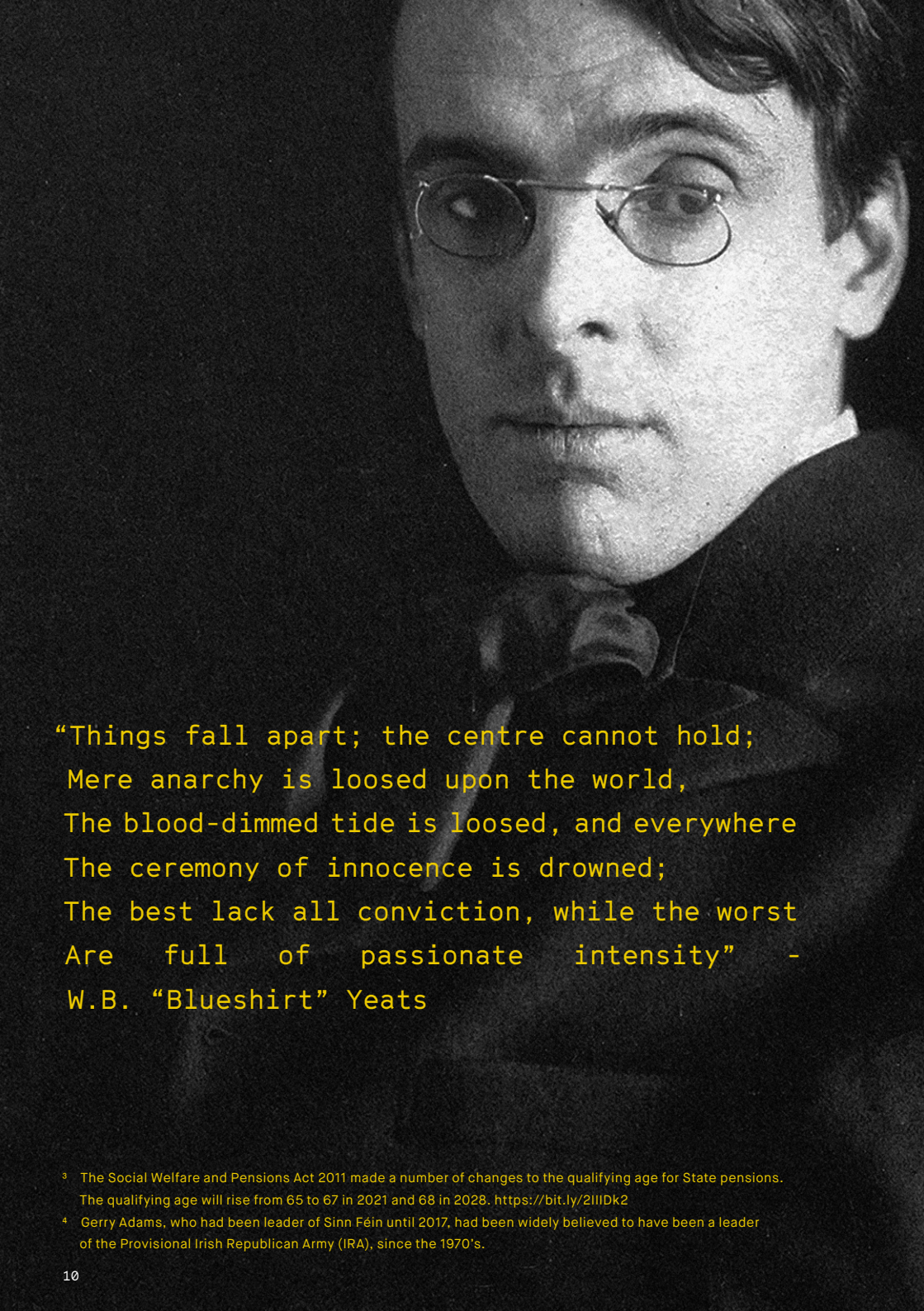
End of the beginning.

Irish politics has long been heralded as a beacon of stability, in Western Europe. One factor of this stability is the crowning roughly every 4/5 years of heirs from Ireland's two main parties: Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG). These are the two parties created during the Civil War, when pro-Anglo-Irish Treaty IRA became Fine Gael, and anti-Anglo-Irish Treaty IRA became Fianna Fáil¹. The parties have jockeyed for primacy at each General Election, with the Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Fortune) being seen as the party of the relatively poorer, tenant farmer, economically liberal and socially conservative (at least until the influence of John Charles McQuaid and the Catholic Church waned in the 90's). Fine Gael (Tribe of the Irish) were the party of the Irish Blueshirts (see Fascists, they supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War), the party of the Conservative, Baron farmer class, who were Economically conservative and, post-1960's, socially liberal.

The rest of the parties (Labour, Sinn Féin and the Progressive Democrats, Social Democrats, Green Party and the Independent Alliance) languished as perennial junior coalition parties, where they would go into coalition with either Fianna Fáil, or Fine Gael before receding into obscurity for two election cycles. This was much expected to be the case in 2020, with Fianna Fáil who had been ignominiously thrown out of Government after the Financial Crash of 2007 for financially mismanaging the economy, which led to our Property Market overheating, Ireland being saddled with private, speculators debt (which led to us being the third most indebted country in the World²).

¹ The Anglo-Irish Treaty was the Treaty signed by Michael Collins, ceding the 6 Counties of Northern Ireland to the Crown, as well as Treaty ports in the Republic, in return for an end to the War of Independence and withdrawal of British troops, and the acknowledgement that Ireland was a Free State from within a year as a self-governing dominion within the "community of nations known as the British Empire". This would later be repealed, and Ireland would become a republic in 1937, with its own Constitution, Bunreacht na hEireann.

² This did not improve in the intervening years (<https://bit.ly/2uEtwER>). Even with the rapid turnaround in employment and growth, Ireland still has one of the highest per capita debt levels in the world, which equates to €44,365 for every man, woman and child in the State or nearly €90,000 for every worker in the economy.



“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity” -
W.B. “Blueshirt” Yeats

³ The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 made a number of changes to the qualifying age for State pensions. The qualifying age will rise from 65 to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. <https://bit.ly/2IIIDk2>

⁴ Gerry Adams, who had been leader of Sinn Féin until 2017, had been widely believed to have been a leader of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), since the 1970's.

This, in spite of Ireland being internationally lauded as an “economic miracle”, with incredibly low, corporation taxes, a highly educated workforce and political steadiness. However, this papered over the crises at the heart of the FF/FG Political Project, whose exposure required three things:

1. A young, educated workforce who would leave at the first sign of financial contraction and return to buy houses and raise their children, who would vote for either Fianna Fáil/ Fine Gael. The young people who had grown-up in the Celtic Tiger (mid-1990s to the late-2000s) had chosen to stay, and follow the European model of renting, which exposed both the dearth of public investment in housing since the '70s, and the rapacious greed of the propertied classes, who have in the main been FF/FG voters, members and representatives. This Rental Crisis meant anyone who couldn't afford a house in Ireland wanted a solution to the Rental Crisis, which FF/FG were ill-equipped to provide, as they were the landlords, or the landlords friends.
2. A large public sector (Health Service, Education, Police and Public Construction) which would soak up any overflow, and sons and daughters of FG/FF politicians, with easy-to-get mortgages. This has been bloated by middle-management for several decades. The HSE (Health Service Executive) has been mismanaged by every FF/FG Government since Fianna Fáil/ Fine Gael sold out the Socialist TD, Dr. Noël Browne, by scrapping the Mother and Child Scheme in 1950. Further, Fianna Fáil, with the abolition of domestic property rates in the late 1970s, local councils have found it extremely difficult to raise money, and build public housing. This became a problem for the 50-65 generation, whose children did not want to emigrate, or pay the exorbitant rents, and they had to stay with their parents.
3. A strong, public pension service at 65, with free healthcare/ transport and allowance. The mandatory age for availing was raised by Fine Gael in 2011³ to 67. This was a money-saving exercise designed to balance the books after FF/FG agreed to bailout European speculators, several Irish, private banks, and neither FF, nor FG planned on changing. Historically, the over-65 voting bloc were split down the middle in favour of FF/FG, as the two Civil-War Era Political Parties, were fresh out of ideas, and paid the price at the polls.

This, combined with a powerful, unifying figure in Mary-Lou MacDonald who was sufficiently removed from the Troubles⁴ which had historically made Sinn Féin "unelectable" in many constituencies, resulted in Sinn Féin winning the most votes in the land (though not the most seats). They offered a more hopeful, pragmatic and fairer manifesto. The onus is on them to energeise a left wing that has been in decline since Connolly. They have a world to win.

What does this mean for anarchists?

While the jury is still out on what fabric the new Government will have, the old order is no longer invincible. Sinn Féin have shown us that the hegemony of the centre-right no longer has a monopoly on the reigns of power. If another election is called (meaning Fianna Fáil have failed to form a government with Fine Gael, and the Greens prove too neoliberal to form a government with Sinn Féin, and other left-wing parties), this could be the first shoots of a real, viable left-wing in Ireland, a left-wing capable of unifying the island (given Brexit), against the status quo of property speculators, civil servants and finally put Civil-War era politics to rest.

By Dr. W.D. Sharkey

Renters of the world,
unite! You have
nothing to lose but
your parasite!

I ran an LGBTQI+ Society at a school in which I used to work. The society would meet after school weekly (so potential bullies wouldn't be skulking around trying to find out who the "queers" were in the school), and was well attended by a group of marginalised, anxious, socially uneasy, socially rejected and socially rejecting young people. This group numbered around 20 pupils and, despite the fairly high population, and despite their militant solidarity, they were often the target of in-school violence. Indeed, many of whom had been victims of abuse and harassment outside of school (one pupil had their windows smashed almost every month by transphobic members of their community). This constant threat manifested in constant fear and I felt helpless to deal with it. All I could do was offer a safe space, once a week, in my classroom where they could talk, make jokes, learn about each other, learn about themselves, and stand together in their shared marginalisation. Each week I would listen to them discussing the various hateful, loathsome, putrid things people had said and done to them, and each week they would discuss this with a humour and a bravery that humbles me to this day.

Being desperate to do more than offer a classroom alongside my powerless "thoughts and prayers", I arranged for a Police Community Support Officer (ACAB, tho) to come to school every fortnight and help our pupils deal with the abuse they suffered. The PSCO, herself a member of the LGBT community, was overwhelmed with how supportive and (importantly) useful the group itself was. They were mutually reinforcing, mutually supportive, and internally critical regarding their group practices. In short, they were a (mostly) self-organised community project oriented around mutual-care. The PSCO decided that the town itself (and not just the school) might benefit from such a society and asked for some help and advice on how best to set this up. My part in this project was very small, but I did what I could. I designed posters, I organised a meeting space, I used my group as a sounding board for our ideas. After around two months of planning and [careful] publicity the PSCO decided to invite me (NOT a member of the LGBTQI+ community) to attend the first meeting. This was for two reasons:

1. She wanted to publicly recognise the efforts I had gone to in setting up a school LGBTQI+ society, and the unconditional help I had offered to help set up a town-wide group.
2. She wanted to encourage my pupils to come along as they made up a significant number of the town's LGBTQI+ community. A friendly-ish and familiar face would make it more likely that my pupils would turn up.

Being extremely flattered that my efforts were being recognised, I immediately accepted the invitation stating that I would be honoured to come along to the first meeting. Several of my pupils told me that they'd come along since I'd be there, and I was hopeful that an initial introduction to a new group would make them more comfortable with going along in future henceforth.

The day before the group was due to meet I was called to the Deputy Head's office. She told me, bluntly, that I was forbidden from going to the town's first ever LGBTQI+ meeting, or indeed, any other such meeting hence. Now, this group was due to meet after work (six o'clock in the evening) in a public place (a local café, had agreed to stay open late to support the group) with members of the actual police present. When I pointed this out, I was told that it still presented a "safeguarding" issue and that my job could be jeopardised were I to go along.

My job as a teacher is overwhelming. It tells me when to wake up (03:45), when I can eat (07:30, 11:00, 13:30, 15:00), where I can eat (I cannot leave the school premises without good reason, even during breaks), what I can wear (formal clothes – I push the boundaries of this by wearing a shirt-jumper-tie combo), when I can go to the bathroom (see eating times), and now it was telling me with whom I could socialise inside, and outside, of work.

My own time was no longer time with which I could do what I wanted. I had reconciled myself (just about) to the overbearing biopolitics of work in late-stage capitalism and how it would remove my control and organise my time during the hours of my employment, but this was something, or this felt like something, further... This obvious injustice, this overstepping, had me retching with fury and disbelief. I would have quit my job immediately had it not been for one, major, issue – I would be unable to pay my rent.

The existence of rent, the fear of homelessness, caused me to compromise my values, to compromise my integrity, and – worst of all – to betray and let-down a community, no, not an abstract community, a group of alienated and vulnerable children relying on my help. I could not help, I could not take a stand, because I could not afford to help or take a stand. Rent caused me to act in a way I wouldn't have, had all things been equal... but all things were not equal; not for the pupils who faced an onslaught of bigotry functionally facilitated by a school unwilling to



allow a teacher to go to an after school social event, nor for the teacher who couldn't afford to even threaten to resign. The existence of rent was the existence of a threat on an already fragile precarity.

The modern economy pays us enough to pay rent, it does not pay us enough to save-up so we can resign from our jobs unless we are guaranteed a seamless salary transition. Rent has thus become a form of control capitalism imposes upon us.

How do we remove this form of control?

One possible answer is to remove the near parity between rent costs and wages. In the

UK, rent is currently anywhere between 46% and 61% of a person's income, despite experts saying this should be no more than 35%¹. Increasing income would reduce this ratio, thus allowing a person enough financial space to save money and survive for a suitably long time were they to decide to take a "career break".

Given that employers will not be motivated to increase the wages and salaries of their workers, especially not for the reasons given (capital wants flexible workers, but on its terms, not on the worker's terms), and given that parasitic landlords (or "landlords" as they're known) would respond to this increase in fluid capital by jacking-up rents, increasing the supply of money does not seem like a viable solution.

Another, surprisingly popular answer (at least, amongst left-leaning economists) is to introduce rent control legislation. Indeed, in a recent article in Jacobin Magazine², Chew and Goldstein note both that rent control is making a comeback, and that Elizabeth Warren has already, at the federal level, included incentives for areas to pass rent control legislation, while at the same time accepting that *“we are facing the worst renter crisis in a generation”* (I think this is an understatement). If this is the case, what is the problem? The problem is, of course, the existence of a private rental market. Regulating this sector simply causes it to change its language. If you introduce rent controls for housing that meets “basic needs” (e.g. housing for low-income families), the market responds by recoding basic housing as something else; *“sure, rent controls should apply to basic housing, but we don’t offer basic housing... sorry”*. And this isn’t speculation. Marketing can turn an atrocious story about Theresa May’s government housing migrants and homeless children in “converted” shipping containers³, into an exciting, cool, gentrified, quasi-hipster housing experience. *“These aren’t converted shipping containers, they’re “modular homes” and they cost around £656 (~EUR755) p/m. Payment by direct debit will be fine, thanks. Also I’ll need a month’s rent in advance. Bills are not included”*.⁴ They’re not an expression of desperation, they’re cool. And no, these units, these “modular homes” would not satisfy the conditions for being subject to rent controls.

Rent controls on their own wouldn’t work, and looking at who our legislators are I’m not hopeful that legislation could be tightened up to remove the space for exploitation or loopholing. In the UK, Emily Thornberry MP is running to be leader of the Labour Party. Even if she doesn’t win (and she won’t), her voice carries a lot of weight and her support will be necessary if Labour are to avoid the self-gratifying self-destruction that took place under Corbyn. I wonder if this support will be removed if a leader proposes to diminish the power of landlords when her own property portfolio is reported to be valued at around £4.6m (~EUR5.5m)⁵. If this is what the Labour Party are offering as an alternative, if this is the best the Labour Party can do, you will forgive my cynicism about the possibility of robust rent-control legislation.

So if increasing the amount of money people are paid won’t work, and introducing legislation to cap what the private rental sector can charge won’t work, what are we to do?

One solution is to diminish the monopoly the private sector has on housing. This would mean kick-starting a social housing programme where the relevant district authority could offer people a safe, standard meeting, home at a price they could afford. This solution is fine, as it goes. We could add a condition that if one were to lose one’s job (or rage-quit for reasons of injustice), rent would be offset by housing benefit which could kick in immediately since the council is both the housing-supplier and the benefit-provider. Effectively, if one can afford only to pay zero rent, then zero rent is what one should pay.

I feel that this solution lacks ambition. Education and health are both (correctly, in my opinion) considered a right. As such, there are provisions offered to deliver these services for free (in the UK, at least). A good standard of education is offered to all young people (up to the age of eighteen) in England and Wales, if one wants something more “bespoke” or “power-network-facilitating”, one can if one wants pay for private schooling (perversely called “public schooling”

¹ <https://bit.ly/39VkpVG>

² <https://bit.ly/39XuACH>

³ <https://bbc.in/3a28sHh>

⁴ <https://bit.ly/2SQeDbO>

⁵ <https://bit.ly/2VhYH3M>

in England for obscure historical reasons). Similarly, with health; a good standard of care is provided to the citizen-subjects of England. If one wants something entirely superfluous, one can pay for private care. In both cases everyone is assured that their basic (and epi-basic) needs are being met, and they can obtain access to additional services if the market is prepared to provide it, and they are prepared to pay for it.

Can we not do the same with housing? One might object that the environmental implications of starting a building project that would need to meet the requirements for, in principle, every home-seeker in the UK would be catastrophic. Indeed, even if I were to grant this argument and concede that it would be unreasonable to start building all these homes, I could just state that there are over 200,000 long-term empty homes in the UK at the moment. Not a future, “hypothetical”, 200,000 empty homes, an actual, already existing 200,000 empty homes currently not in circulation⁶ – could these not be either reappropriated from the people withholding them from public use, without making use of them themselves? Or, being a bit less red-and-black-flag-waving, the state (yuck) could use their purchasing and legal power to produce a series of Compulsory Purchase Orders where the amount offered was near market value. No-one needs a second home. Certainly no-one needs a third home... or a fourth, etc. Those who want housing have a guaranteed means of getting it. Those who want something above what could be considered “basic” (safe, comfortable, stable – basic is far better than those currently trapped in the private rental sector can expect to enjoy) would be free to find someone prepared to rent them a fancy penthouse somewhere – the private rental market will not simply vanish; it just won’t enjoy the powerful stranglehold it currently does over the entire population of almost every developed economy. If the private sector justifies their existence by claiming to offer a better product at market efficient prices, then they will have nothing to worry about. Wink.

Free housing for all who want it is so far removed from what our political consciousness considers possible – especially when Jeremy Corbyn has just been trounced in an election in which he was mocked for offering people free broadband (economically extremely easy to do, even under the current conditions and understanding of what is possible) – but then so would free education and free healthcare have been when they were first proposed. If we are to take seriously the claim that housing is a right, that every person ought to have a warm, safe, place to rest, then offering free housing isn’t radical – it’s the bare minimum we can do.

At the moment, private landlords can charge exorbitant fees and determine the conditions in which one will live, and the way in which one can interact with the space one is renting. They can remove “reasonable wear and tear” clauses so you have to replace everything when you leave. They can tell you if you can have a pet – spoiler, you can’t (and heaven help you if you already have a pet – most landlords would rather see your cat in a river drowning, before they consent to your bringing it into your home (because they don’t see it as your home, but their property). They can tell you to move out if you are in receipt of benefits (No DSS!), even if you are still able to pay rent.

In short, rent is a fuck: abolish rent for those who don’t want to. It’s the first move to getting some semblance of our dignity back. And after we’ve got it, we’ll be coming for unjust employers – with their oppressive working terms and conditions – next.

⁶ <https://bit.ly/2unU6lv>

By Brad Fredricks

Athens Housing Crisis

Brad Fredricks is a journalist and filmmaker who has been exploring the crossroads of capitalism and democracy through his series, "Surviving Capitalism". He has hosted a local series of forums in and around Athens, most notably, "Surviving Capitalism: Athens Housing Crisis", where he explored the impacts of Airbnb and the Greek Golden Visa program.

According to the World Bank¹, Europe is facing an affordable housing crisis. A trend of inflated prices across Europe's major cities mirrors similar events globally, a growing crisis that is encroaching on the quality of life of not just lower-income classes, but also working classes and upper class.

In Athens, Greece, rents have spiked dramatically in one year, from 2018 to 2019 the costs of renting a flat increased an average of 14.82%, according to Greece's number one real estate website, Spitogatos². Flat rental price rates skyrocketed 25% from 2017-2019³, yet wages in Greece have steadily decreased since their peak of approximately €1400 in 2012, to €1000 in 2018⁴.

It is important to note that Greece had exceptional circumstances with its economic collapse. The Greek Home Price Index dropped from 100 in 2009 to 58.9 in 2017 and has rebounded to 64.40 in 2019⁵. This was good for the capital class, who were able to take advantage of low housing prices, turning them into rentals. It is clear that the average citizens of Greece, as with the rest of Europe, are bearing the burden of stagnating, and in some cases deflating wages, and increasing housing costs.

¹ <https://bit.ly/2vkHMmw>

² <https://bit.ly/2WcCN2k>

³ <https://bit.ly/2xDPiK9>

⁴ <https://bit.ly/2lIMnCe>

⁵ <https://bit.ly/39R8LVV>

With surging rental rates, many people in the middle-class and those that are otherwise economic exiles, a class or group of individuals without financial means in a capitalist society, such as refugees, are left grappling to find affordable housing. Often resulting in pushing those most vulnerable, to the physical fringes of society, where undesirable accommodations far from urban cores and jobs.

Municipalities across Europe have responded with a myriad of efforts to stave off unsustainable housing prices. In Berlin, Germany, the municipal government has issued a five-year freeze⁶, and in some instances lowering of rent prices in an effort to combat the problem. Launched in July 2013, the Greek “Golden Visa”⁷ program provides foreigners residency in the EU without being a citizen with the purchase of a property with a value of €250,000 or more.

The Golden Visa is a band-aid attempt at addressing an economic issue, however, it is further compounding skyrocketing rental rates in Athens with the rise of Airbnb and the short-term rental market. Many foreign investors are taking advantage of the popularity of Athens as a tourist destination making a profit and obtaining access to an EU lifestyle.

While some question the link between Airbnb and increased costs, research from Harvard Law & Policy Review⁸ states that “*Airbnb likely reduces the affordable housing supply by distorting the housing market in two interconnected mechanisms*”. Specifically, the removal of previously local housing and the increase in hotel supply, which leads to inflated rental prices and housing prices as the homes represent greater profitability in the short term rental market than they do on long term rentals. While it is argued that Airbnb has helped innumerable people survive the economic

crisis, it is clear that the runaway success of the platform has led to runaway increases in rent prices and even the home values in and around Athens city center.

This flip of local community-oriented neighborhoods to transient tourist enclaves hits at the heart of what it is to be local and communal. In the neighborhood Exarcheia, a notable Anarchist enclave of Athens, the city Police raided longtime squats that were used to provide auxiliary housing for refugees. Some of these properties have since been purchased by foreigners taking advantage of the Golden Visa program only to find those properties converted into “Ghost Hotels”, or properties otherwise unoccupied by long-term tenants, providing short-term tourism-based renters with self-check-in entry to once locally occupied apartments. Exarcheia being an extreme example, the emergence of ghost hotels has been replicating worldwide.

In response to the advent of Airbnb, local protests have arisen, taking form in graffiti, wheat-paste posterings, formal marches of protests, and even social media profiles like “Exarcheia Tourism”⁹, a self-described “*anti-authoritarian grouping of individuals defining, defending, expanding and progressing the alternative & rebellious vision of Exarcheia*”.

The platform helped many Greeks through harsh economic times, such as Spyros, an officer in Hellenic Forces, who said, “*...I am making extra money thanks to Airbnb. I have a small house in Athens I rent on Airbnb, but what I try to offer my guests is the more original version of Athens. To show them and explain to them the culture...*”

Reflecting on the well-intentioned origins of Airbnb, as per founder, Brian Chesky who stated, “*We started doing it because we really couldn’t afford to stay in our apartments*”¹⁰. It seems Airbnb, a

San Francisco Bay area start-up, may have inadvertently exported their local problems¹¹ to the rest of the world.

Where hosts like Spyros seek to bring a deeper understanding of Greek culture, the types of tourism that have flourished in Exarcheia seem to be nothing more than cash-grab operations that take no consideration of the local culture itself, providing foreigners with a cheap way into the EU at the expense of a local community, as foreigners seeking sunny skies, souvlaki, and cheap rent bring their foreign wages, often far greater than the average monthly salary of an Athenian's €800–€1,000.

While the problem has become clear to many, the lack of regulations of short-term rental platforms seems to be the most common and largest single contributing factor to increasing rental rates worldwide. Many local municipalities are left to fight a €40 billion-dollar multinational corporation with budgets that cannot stand against the economic resources of Airbnb.

So long as uncoordinated efforts persist, it seems likely that Airbnb will avoid any regulations that curtail its efforts. With an issue as pervasive as this, it seems that solidarity and action are needed now more than ever, which looks like the sharing of ideas, the coordinated efforts of awareness, and quick actions at local, municipal, national and global scale.

Images: Posters from streets of Athens.
Courtesy of Brad Fredricks.

⁶ <https://bit.ly/3aW9Z2d>

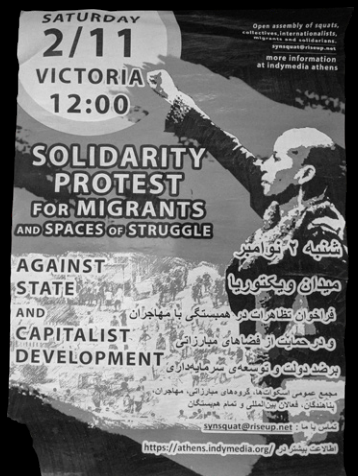
⁷ <https://www.goldenvisas.com/greece>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/2QgRY6W>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/exarcheiatourism/>

¹⁰ <https://bit.ly/2IKYeQ9>

¹¹ <https://cnn.it/2TQRarF>



By Koukaki's and nearby areas' residents

Collective resistance against the hyper- commodified world of Real Estate

Most people in European metropolises are all too familiar with the housing crisis. An increasing number of residents are faced with extremely rising housing costs and unaffordability, to a large extent due to inflated property values against low or absent growth to an already extremely low income. The hyper-commodified world of real estate in neoliberal capitalism, in which we are trying to survive, makes us witness the transformation of housing from lived, social space to a profit making tool every day. All these different situations lead to one main argument; housing is under attack.

In Greece, tourism has been considered as a “heavy industry” since the ‘60s, with consequences affecting the social, working and natural environment. Recently, tourism has invaded urban spaces, altering their cultural and political identity. In Athens, we have been experiencing an excessively ruthless rise of housing costs in the past five years. The economic crisis of the past 12 years has, of course, revealed the first symptoms of the housing issue and set the mark for the building and neighborhoods policy in the years to come. Homelessness has been raised to levels higher than ever before; meanwhile, vacant houses, not participating in the housing supply, have been doubled in the decade 2001-2011, reaching disproportionately high numbers, since the real estate market has never stopped working at the expense of people.

Especially in Athens, the "tourism boom" has created an unbearable situation in a very short time frame. With the already known slogans about *"the true touristic experience"*, *"live like a local"* accompanying every tourist campaign, all aspects of life can be commercialized and seen as potential profit sources. Residence is turned into a tourist accommodation and the landlord becomes a speculative businessman who either forces tenants to leave their house, or evicts them with exorbitant rent increases. At the same time, real estate and investment companies play a key role in the rental market. The extreme transformation and expansion of the city's "tourist map" and the policy of short-term leasing, with the Airbnb platform in prominent position, comes with gentrification plans, the displacement of residents, evictions and extensive police repression, demanding more and more consumption-friendly residents in neighborhoods that seem more like theme parks. In this reality, housing squats and the social and political characteristics that blossom in all collective spaces are accused of obstructing the "development" to come, and the people involved are massively framed as outcasts or terrorists. Hilarious arguments are used in order to eliminate and criminalize the unwanted collective and political actions, leaving a few more buildings empty and abandoned.



Image: Re-occupation of an evicted squat in Koukaki, Athens. The banner says "We destroy the walls, as we are traveling to the liberty".

koukaki

Some information for visitors

Welcome to our neighborhood,
If you are a visitor in Athens and you have selected, via Airbnb or other platforms, Koukaki and surrounding areas for your accommodation, consider the below:

Koukaki and surrounding areas are losing their identity due to mass tourism and its repercussions that have been reflected on our everyday life the recent years. This neighborhood is transformed, in other words gentrified, like many cities in the western world. Our neighborhood is not viable anymore for us, the residents. We live here, we work here and we interact with each other daily, not just for a few days. Some of us used to be locals.

The residents here are being forced to vacate their home, either by rent raise, or by direct evictions, in order to be turned into tourist accommodation, while the growing real estate industry profiteers from this situation. Finding a new place to live has become outrageously difficult, since touristification has taken place in the entire Athens.

The local market and useful services are decreased day by day aiming to make room for shops that serve the needs of tourists. When a grocery closes, a laundry takes its place for your convenience and only. All these affect every social group: Workers, families, elderly and students. More tourism does not always mean more benefit to the host communities. Meanwhile, the government, being attracted by capital investments, has given its full consent! We hope we disturb you and your "alternative" way of living your myth in Greece.

Thank you,

Koukaki's and nearby areas' residents.



Such problems are obvious not only in Athens city centre, but spreading accordingly in the whole city. Urban and suburban neighborhoods are changing, depending on their vicinity to tourist attractions and their social and political atlas. Touristification as part of a bigger picture includes gentrification as the key tool eliminating our neighborhoods. It is part of the same reality that discriminates “welcome” from “unwelcome” foreigners, throwing refugees who manage to survive floating barriers into concentration camps, while the privileged are invited to buy off their access through “golden visa” investments.

Our neighborhood, Koukaki, has become a tourist “product” for sale. The number of Airbnb apartments is huge and most stores serve touristic facilities. Many neighbors have been displaced, social ties are lost, and the character of the district is being altered. Simultaneously, the number of students in the area’s schools is decreasing year by year, and shops that do not serve tourism are closing. The daily routine of residents is completely out of line with tourism standards, thus causing a lifeless reality and an indirect, inevitable displacement, making obvious that the housing issue needs to be underlined.

Needing to understand what in hell is happening in our neighborhood and to act collectively, we first gathered in May 2019, initiating a discussion and record about where “economic development” leads to. By choice, to emphasize the claim to free public spaces, our meeting point is a pedestrian street. There, on a weekly basis, we discuss everything in public and we are open to everyone. With informative texts, posters, flyers, stencils, documentary and music events, demonstrations in the local streets, we are trying to propagate the consequences of gentrification-touristification in our lives.

This suffocative social and economic condition that the government, assisted by media and police forces, advertises as “development”, is answered by the many collectives that have been created across the city, fighting to inform against it.

It’s not only about our neighborhoods, but also about the life we want to live in them. We combine our resistances against the commodification of every aspect of our lives, at least with our consistent presence in public spaces.

This is a chant we use in demonstrations; it sounds like:

**"If we do not get organized in all neighborhoods,
our cities will become modern prisons".**

Left: A leaflet that was distributed to locals and tourists in Koukaki by the activist group “Koukaki’s and nearby areas’ residents”.

www.antiairbnbkoukaki.noblogs.org
Email: anti-bnb-koukaki@riseup.net

What is going to happen here?

Habita!¹ belongs to all people and communities. Those who are exploited by the law of the strongest and who have compromised their right to live in a decent home and environment. We are activists and we develop our strategies based on daily practice with all the people directly affected who are willing to fight for their rights. This struggle is a daily activity that leads us to live a more complete and dignified life: getting a house, resisting eviction or saving a square from privatization or other important equipment for the life of the community.

Stop Despejos² is a collective fighting for an end to evictions, the defense of the right to housing and the collective construction, inclusive and fair in our cities. We defend the right to decent housing for everyone, the right to the city and the right to remain in their neighborhood.

Left Hand Rotation³ is an art collective established in 2004 to develop pilot projects in different formats such as video, documentary, installations and urban interventions.

“What is going to happen here?”⁴ is a documentary movie about the social movement advocating the right to live in the city of Lisbon, at a time when the various fights for the urban space have increased – the result of the expansion of finance capitalism that concentrates wealth in the hands of a few people, and increases social inequalities.

A documentary about those who challenge the transformation of the city into a merchandise, those who disobey in front of injustice by building power structures for and with the ones who need a place to live. A documentary by Left Hand Rotation in collaboration with Stop Despejos and Habita!

¹ <https://habita.info>

² <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/>

³ www.lefthandrotation.com

⁴ <https://vimeo.com/357310878>



Image: Protestors taking to the streets of Lisbon to demonstrate against the housing crisis.
Courtesy of Left Hand Rotation.

About Lisbon

Admitting that there is a housing crisis in Lisbon and Portugal is now commonplace. However, it should be borne in mind that in the most recent and most visible economic crisis (which combines the effects of global financialization with those of the touristification of the economy, the gentrification of cities and the consequent expulsion of their inhabitants, as happens in many other cities in the world), the housing crisis in Lisbon and Portugal is structural and deep, the result of decades of housing policies that have encouraged the construction and acquisition of houses, enriching developers and banks, accumulating a large inheritance of empty houses and leaving aside all those who did not have the capacity to yearn for property. In a country where poverty reaches 20% and public housing is reduced to 2%, the waiting lists for “social” housing reach many thousands. Dozens of these families resist, occupying houses that have been empty for years, returning them to their social function, but living under the constant threat of eviction.

Officially, there are more than 26,000 families in a “situation of serious housing precariousness”: single-parent families, migrants, the elderly, and people with minimum wages, in degraded houses, even living in public space in tents, not to mention the overcrowding of families in small houses –10% according to official statistics. Also in the peripheries, in self-built neighborhoods, and in order to liberalize land for the real estate business, many people are expelled and their houses demolished.

In the main cities, rents have tripled or quadrupled in recent years, becoming unbearable: in Lisbon, the family effort rate is over 50% of income, there are houses for rent for 600/800 euros and every day we see non-renewals of contracts and inhumane, albeit legal, evictions. The houses on the market are no longer intended for the social function of providing a place to live (precisely for those who make the cities work), but for speculation, accumulation and circulation of capital, tourist accommodation and for foreign residents who are millionaires, attracted by the tax benefits and the supply of Portuguese nationality in the short term.

The documentary “O que vai acontecer aqui? (What is going to happen here?, 2019)” tries to dignify the struggles of social movements for housing in the Lisbon of the times of the so-called “Portuguese economic miracle”, movements and collectives that defend the right to live in the Portuguese capital, at a time of intensified struggles for urban space caused by the expansion of financial capitalism, which concentrates wealth in the hands of a few, and increases social inequality. A documentary about those who challenge the conversion of the city into a commodity, about those who disobey injustice by building power on the side of those who seek a place to live.

By Dan Connolly

A night out in Nottingham...

The first time I took LSD and the first time I properly met a homeless person happened on the same evening. I was in Nottingham for a friend's birthday, also my first time in the city. We had taken the train and booked a hotel right next to the station, checking in and then going out again, taking a taxi straight to Rock City for a club night.

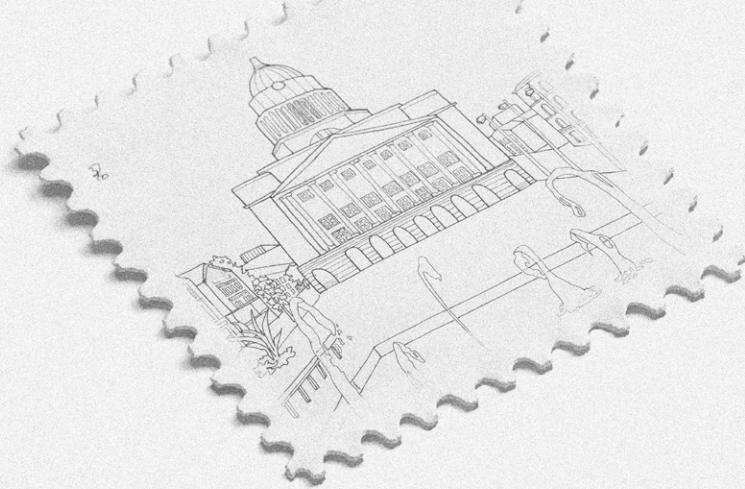
The LSD had been burning a hole in my wallet for a while, just waiting to present itself at the right moment and the moment felt right, so I imbibed as soon as we entered. The next few hours were something of a blur, it wasn't a hugely strong trip, but it was the first. Before I knew it the night was over and I had managed to reconvene with my friends, all of them quite drunk and in no mood to leave in a hurry, contrary to my own feelings.

So I left them, telling them I would make my own way back to the hotel and walked out into the night. It was after about ten minutes of walking that I realised a few things, I had no idea where I was, I had no idea where I had just come from and I had no idea where I was going to. However, I felt no real sense of urgency to reach my destination and so strolled in a vaguely downhill direction, any sense of fear of my situation mollified by the universal empathy I felt.

This is where I met him, he did give me his age and name, but it's lost to time and memory now. He was a similar age to myself at the time I would have guessed, early 20's. He came up and asked me for some change. I was one with everything, money meant nothing at that point so I did what I felt was the right thing to do at that moment and gave him all the money in my wallet. This wasn't a huge amount, a fiver and change, but he appreciated it nonetheless.

We talked, he told me of how he had been asking for change earlier in the evening further down the street, he told me of how a young woman had thrown some change on the floor in front of him and how, as he had bent to pick it up, she kicked him in the face, he showed me the swollen and bruised cheek. I couldn't understand that mentality. It made me feel infinitely angry.

He told me how the money I had given him meant that he and his girlfriend could eat for the night and most of the next day. We talked for a while, though most of it forgotten now, I told him I had taken LSD and had no idea where I was, that was where he offered to walk me to my hotel. This to me at that moment seemed like a fair trade and he seemed like a very down to earth guy so I took him up on the offer. On the way we talked more, he told me how he ended up on the streets with his brother at the age of 16, how his dad had kicked them both out of the house and how he and his brother had lived on the streets, looking out for each other. He told me about how his brother now had a home and that he had offered to house him, but he felt that he would be a burden to him as his house was so small it could only really comfortably house one.



I remember the abuse shouted at him as we walked to the hotel, at one point a pair of women came up to us, asked me for a lighter and when I told them I didn't have one, proceeded to berate him for being homeless, asking me why I was talking to him. It disgusted me then as it still does now.

Finally we walked up to the hotel I was staying at, I thanked him, not only for being a kind guide for someone lost between realities, but for sharing some of his stories with me. I went up to my room and brought him down a spare lighter, a small thanks. I wished him well and went up to my room. My mind raced at the injustice, someone left to fend for themselves at such a young age, with the added responsibility of looking out for a younger sibling. The experience combined with the substance and became something formative for me. The sense that nobody should have to live that way burned away at me and still does. I don't remember his name but I can't forget that experience.

By Giorgos Kossyfas

Another story memory

Nightfall. The sun had ritually packed up the folds of her white dress into the leaden waves of Amvrakikos gulf. The waves splashed soothingly on the shore, rocking the dock's fishing boats.

The human activity in the shops of the seaside town was poor, sluggish -it was December, after all. There were hardly any people passing by the window of the deserted café at the edges of the city. An old, tatty farming truck entertained the city's musing. On the other side of the road, still in front of that café, separating it from the beach, an old couple was looking out over the sea, sitting on a rickety bench. But they got up and left in a hurry. It had started raining, as attested by the thick drops on the glass and the obscure gray reflections on the night's black veil, as the first stars glimmered over the heavy dark clouds.

All this was observed by a stranger sitting behind the tall window of the café, taking notes in a worn-out red notebook. As soon as he saw the rain, he glanced at his watch -though he expected no one. He got up, left a few coins on the tin table, and, on his way out, he waved at another regular of that café, a portly gentleman whose head was restlessly resting on his chest and his ever-puzzled expression was hidden behind his silver moustache. His quirky expression slightly eased the stranger's mood as he walked out of the café on the outskirts of the city.

His aged body humped instinctively, touching the violent gust of wind that resonated with its humming in every alley in the city.

After pulling his coat closer to his body, he went uphill, wildly driven by an inexplicable passion. "Remember what you wrote about? Hm, here it is! The solution to your stalemate goes beyond that of the world-forgotten state!" Those were the words he regularly brought back to his mind, as expressed by his publisher, years ago when he was still... if not a writer... Well, whatever he was. At least, that's what people said so. Now, no one says anything. "Go back to the past you imagined". Every feeble resistance went in vain. She knew him since he was a little boy and superbly manipulated him, now he couldn't even recall how her face looked like. Her charm tormented him, he knew that no retrospective would help him.

And yet, here he was! Going uphill at Agios Athanasios, in whose courtyard -decades ago- spent a few summers. But what he was looking for was a lost soul, a ghost that was still in the courtyard, making the psalters mumbling and roaring at its passage.

A mix of excitement and timidity struck his chest as he ascended. An ancient wound on his ankle got triggered by his effort. But all was forgotten when he saw before him the dark mass of the church and behind it, the house, his mother's home. These two Doric buildings, inextricably tied to Papa-Giorgi, the stranger's grandfather, who he so wished he had not lost -he would give anything to bring him back- before he was full of his love and excellence, his courtesy and wisdom!

As his eyes filled with the spectrum of the ruined past, his soul and mind surrendered to nostalgia. The two ghost buildings and all the frantic silence came to life. The aroma of lemon trees, the rainy texture of the soil -reminiscent of summer mischiefs and bloody knees- the wind of the lagoon that eclectically cooled the earth with its heavenly touch, played incomprehensible melodies with the leaves and shutters. Suddenly, a different scent overwhelmed him, but he could not tell what it was.

He felt he had been standing there for many bright autumns but it was only for a few moments. But what glory moments those were! The quiet churchyard and the courtyard of his house filled his imagination with colors, voices, movement, smells, life, only for a few redemptive minutes. His eyelids were filled with tears and, wiping his eyelashes, sat at the edge of the yard. What if it was raining? He would stand there for hours... He remembered the red notebook he had left in the café... But he didn't care! He wouldn't write ever again in his life, but little did he care... His grandfather's serene face had vanished every thought in his mind. No literary flicker, no inspiration, forgetfulness had swept everything like a fire in a grassy field beneath a demonic wind. His clumsy, sweetly figure mixed up with the bent, lonely figure of Papadiamantis sitting alone, immersed in his holy thoughts.

His strong emotions were capable of wrapping the sky inside them and creating an eternal sunshine. Publishers, friendships, lovers; nothing was there, only an indescribable calmness under the tears of heaven.

The rain grew stronger and heavier; a bitter wind started blustering; he didn't care; to him everything was perfect; the majesty of God was touching him; he felt a hand on his shoulder, a sunshine on his eyes. He was still, but the sunshine was approaching him, he almost touched the light...

The next morning, the verger found an old man, soaked "up to his soul" with a faint smile under his shaggy beard, lying at the edge of the courtyard of Agios Athanasios. He dully nudged him, and, as he didn't wake up, he pushed him again, until the stranger collapsed in the damp soil. The doctors said it was a heart attack. One of them recognized him. He used to be a writer, he said, but he didn't write anymore. *"In his late years, he was homeless, he must have gone crazy, lived on the street like a dog, no one knows how debased his life was"*, he pensively recalled, rather than actually addressing the young nurse, as both of them prepared him for his family to come. *"Too bad to die amidst the grief of this cursed illness"*, he said indifferently before sinking back into his job. "Proof that he was crazy", commented the young nurse, *"Still smiling!"* rushing with a hurried vigor to lighten up some of his terror for the dead man's smile under the shaggy beard. *"That's a spasm from the cold; result of the heart attack"*, said the doctor in a disapproving nod, and then went silent.

For days no one came to pick him up. The nurse never saw anyone who came to look for him, but at some unspecified point, then, his body was not there.

A n o m i e Aunt



In a world stricken by disease only one man can answer your inane questions while simultaneously dropshipping hair extensions from Wuhan to people around the world at grossly inflated prices, Fiachra O'Connor-O'Brien-Ohhh Myyyy

Dear Comrade Aunt,

Since the defeat of Jeremy Corbyn I've been unable to motivate myself to do much of anything. I just don't see the point of staying in the UK if the people in the UK have become Fascists! What should I do?

Regards

"Allotment Anarchist"

Dear "Allotment Anarchist"

I feel your pain. I couldn't keep watching Bewitched once they replaced Dick York in the second season. What's with all the hate on Fascists?! Have you seen their style? Hugo Boss's best work, mate! BJ is going to bring back that retro jack boot swag. So, calm down! You'll be travelling abroad soon enough as Britain sends the redcoats to reinvade Ireland.

A chara,

I am a Fine Gael voter and landlord (duh!) and I am very perturbed by the victory of Sinn Féin in the recent Irish election. I preferred it when my bootlicking tenants took my class warfare with servile good humour. I don't understand why constantly talking about the IRA being murderers in 80s and 90s didn't hide the fact that our current policies are killing homeless people on the streets of Dublin daily. How can we get the Plebs back in their place?

Regards

"Ivan Yates is my safe word"

Hi "Ivan Yates is my safe word",

That is indeed a conundrum. Well, the first thing you should do is evict all your tenants like a Protestant landlord of auld. They love that shit! #allthelols Then, you need to give that naughty boy Leo a good chat over some Heinos in D4. If only he would have faked empathy better you wouldn't be in this position. Finally, if all else fails do a 180 and accuse Mary Lou of hating the IRA and adopt a Republican Socialist platform. The new millennial voters will abandon her for the newly woke Comrade Coveney. Not bad, eh?

Dear Anomie Aunt,

I am worried that the Coronavirus is going to kill my granny! How can I stop it? Please write back quickly!!!

Best wishes

"Boomer Babe"

OK "Boomer Babe",

I'm not hearing the problem here? So all the old right wing farts die of flu at exactly the right moment to save the planet from capitalism, climate change and Paul McCartney. Pass me that soiled kleenex I'm heading to Weatherspoons.

Anarchy in the 21st Century
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ANOMIE

